

**New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education Monitoring**

District: Riverside Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: February 19, 20, and March 5, 2003

Monitoring Team: Arlene Popovici and Caryl Carthew

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Riverside Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Riverside Township School District with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- The protection of procedural safeguards for students and their families;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and,
- The organization and delivery of programs and services resulting in positive student outcomes.

The self-assessment was designed to identify areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Riverside Township School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Riverside High School on February 11, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its commitment to providing advanced technology to enhance classroom instruction. Teachers are currently using the "Smart Board", an interactive whiteboard, in one of the inclusion classrooms. They report that use of this computer-based multimedia program enhances lesson delivery and creates a record of class discussions for future reference. In addition, teachers have reported that this has

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

enhanced their ability to modify instruction and accommodate students with disabilities within the regular education classroom.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation, Eligibility, and Statewide Assessment were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, length of school day/year, transfer students, and certifications.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding counseling and facilities. The county office has been notified of the facilities issue.

Area(s) of Need:

Counseling – During the on-site monitoring, a review of IEPs, counseling logs, and interviews with school personnel indicated that counseling as a related service is not provided at the frequency specified in the IEP. As such, students are not receiving the amount of services required by their IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that counseling as a related service is provided in accordance with IEPs. The plan must also include a mechanism to provide compensatory services for those services not provided during the current school year. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notice, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of attempts to secure parent participation and notice in native language. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of a meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Notice of a Meeting – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records and interviews with school personnel indicated that notice of an IEP meeting does not inform parents that transition will be discussed, when required.

- **The district will revise its notices of a meeting to ensure they contain all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings for school-age referrals, and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of Child Find. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns regarding classification rates and the need for a procedure to address pre-referral interventions for at-risk students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meeting participants and health summaries and vision/hearing screenings for preschool referrals.

Area(s) of Need:

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records and interviews with school personnel indicated that a regular education teacher is not consistently in attendance for preschool meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a regular education teacher is in attendance at all required meetings for preschool students. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Health Summaries and Vision/Hearing Screenings – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records and interviews with school personnel indicated the district does not consistently conduct vision/hearing screenings and submit health summaries prior to the identification meeting for preschool referrals.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district conducts vision/hearing screenings and submits health summaries for all students referred for initial evaluation, including preschoolers. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation planning meetings and participants, and reevaluations completed by June 30th of student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of timelines for reevaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, IEP components, goals and objectives and their connection to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, IEP implementation dates, annual review timelines, provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation, 90-day evaluation timelines, and teacher access to student IEPs.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding procedures for revising IEPs and procedures for oversight of IEPs for students placed out-of-district.

Area(s) of Need:

IEP Revisions – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of IEPs indicated that the district does not consistently convene a meeting prior to making changes in a student's program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs are revised prior to making changes in student programs and that the parent/adult student is provided with written notice of the proposed change. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

IEP Oversight – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records and interviews with school personnel and parents determined that the district does not have procedures in place to ensure oversight of IEPs and provision of special education and

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

related services for students in out-of-district placements. As a result, some students are not receiving services required by their IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the oversight of the provision of special education and related services for students in out-of-district placements. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of decision making process, LRE documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum of services.

Although the district did not identify concerns with least restrictive environment during the self-assessment process, prior to the on-site monitoring the district identified a concern regarding access to regular education programs for preschool disabled students. Although the district considers and places preschool disabled students in regular education programs as appropriate, they do not consider placement in the district's own regular preschool program. Barriers to inclusion include space issues and need for additional staff training. Since the submission of the improvement plan, the district has discussed plans to include disabled students in the in-district program. **The district's improvement plan, however, is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student/agency invitation, statements of transition service needs and statements of needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preferences and interests survey/assessment. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site monitoring, it was noted that the district has chosen to implement an innovative program to address this area of need. The district is currently in the first year of this four-year program, which assesses student interests and aptitudes. During future years, students will have the opportunity to research careers, learn critical job skills, and apply those skills in actual job experiences. The district is commended for implementing this innovative careers program.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding transition planning for students turning 14.

Area(s) of Need:

Transition Planning for Students Turning 14 – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff members and a review of pupil records indicate that although the district consistently conducts transition planning meetings and invites students to participate in IEP meetings once they turn 14, district personnel were unaware of the requirement to conduct transition planning for students who will turn 14 during the time period the IEP is in effect.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that transition planning is conducted for students who will turn 14 during the time period the IEP is in effect. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

***Section X:* Transition to Preschool**

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of placement in preschool program by age 3.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participation in the preschool transition planning conference.

Area(s) of Need:

Transition Planning Conferences – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews with staff members and a review of pupil records that a child study team member does not consistently participate in the preschool transition planning conference for students who will be aging out of early intervention programs. District personnel report that they are not notified of these meetings so that they are unable to participate.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will establish communication with the early intervention providers to ensure participation in the transition planning conference. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

***Section XI:* Discipline**

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, and behavior intervention plans.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of identification of students as potentially disabled, documentation to the case manager, conducting functional behavioral assessments, conducting manifestation determinations, and placements in interim alternative educational settings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in graduation ceremonies, choice of diploma, and written notice of graduation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP requirements for students turning 14.

Area(s) of Need:

IEP Requirements for Students Turning 14 – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of student records indicate that IEPs for students who will turn 14 during the time period the IEP will be in effect do not consistently include graduation requirements.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs for students turning 14 during the period of time the IEP is in effect include graduation requirements. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, group sizes for speech, home instruction, and provision of teacher consultation time.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding class size for high school resource programs and provision of in-class support at the middle school level.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Class Size – During the on-site monitoring, a review of class lists and interviews with school personnel indicate the enrollment in high school resource classes exceeds the number allowed by code.

- **The district will take immediate action to bring class sizes into compliance. The district will also revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that enrollment in high school resource programs does not exceed the maximum allowable number of students in the future. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Middle School In-class Support Programs – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of student IEPs determined that regular education teachers are providing in-class support services at the middle school level.

- **The district will immediately place appropriately certified teachers of the handicapped in these in-class support classes. The district will also revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that in-class support services are provided by certified teachers of the handicapped in the future. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of other locations of other pupil records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that the central files do not document the location of other files maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files document the location of other files maintained by the district.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Riverside Township School District on February 19, 20, March 5, 2003. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. In addition, some concerns were expressed regarding implementation of IEPs, high school supplemental instruction programs, and district/parent communication.

Areas demonstrating compliance with all standards included General Provision, Evaluation, Eligibility, and Statewide Assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, provision of programs, length of school day/year, transfer procedures, certification, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, independent evaluations, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, preschool reevaluations, IEP meeting participants, IEP components, goals and objectives and the connection to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, timelines for annual reviews and initial evaluations, teacher access to IEPs, individualized decision-making, placement decisions, provision of supplementary aids and services, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of services, student/agency invitations to transition meetings, IEP statements of transition needs, placement in preschool programs by age 3, suspension tracking, development of behavior intervention plans, participation in graduation activities, written notice of graduation, age range, group size for speech, home instruction, provision of teacher consultation time, and procedures for maintaining and destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding documentation of attempts to secure parent participation at meetings, written notice in native language, Child Find, classification rates and intervention strategies for at-risk students, timelines for three-year reevaluations, regular education access for preschool students, assessment of student interests and preferences, discipline procedures, notification to case manager, conducting functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, and placements in interim settings.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding counseling, components of notice of a meeting, identification meeting participants and health summaries and vision/hearing screenings for preschool students, procedures for revising IEPs and monitoring the implementation of IEPs for students placed out-of-district, transition planning and documentation of graduation requirements for students turning 14, preschool transition planning conferences, class size, middle

**New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education Monitoring**

school in-class support programs, and documentation of the locations of other pupil records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Riverside Township School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.